

Alabama Sturgeon Timeline

- 1898 – the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries reported 42,900 pounds of commercial catch of shovelnose sturgeon from the Alabama and Black Warrior Rivers, Alabama.
- 1930 – the *Alabama Game and Fish News* reported shovelnose sturgeon as not uncommon.
- 1976 – the sturgeon was considered rare; only six specimens were known from museums.
- 1976 – Ramsey referred to the sturgeon as the “Alabama shovelnose sturgeon,” noting that it probably was distinct from the shovelnose sturgeon which is found in the Mississippi River Basin, and was also historically known from the Rio Grande.
- 1985 – status survey collections resulted in the capture of five Alabama sturgeon.
- 1990 and 1992 – collection attempts by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR), assisted by the Corps of Engineers, resulted in no captures of Alabama sturgeon.
- 1991 – the Alabama sturgeon was formally described as *Scaphirhynchus suttkusi* by Williams and Clemmer.
- June 15, 1993 – the Service published a proposed rule to list the Alabama sturgeon as endangered with critical habitat.
- December 2, 1993 – a mature male Alabama sturgeon was collected from the Alabama River below Claiborne. The fish was transported to the Marion State Fish Hatchery where it later died.
- December 15, 1994 – the Service withdrew the proposed listing on the basis of insufficient evidence that the species still existed.
- December 15, 1994 – discussions began among the Service, business, industry, and Alabama state government representatives on developing a balanced coalition of economic, environmental and government interests to develop and implement recovery measures for listed aquatic species that can be supported by all interests.
- April 18, 1995 – the first Alabama sturgeon in over one year was captured in the Alabama River by private citizens. Tissue samples were taken and a radio tag was attached to the fish prior to release.
- May 19, 1995 – a second Alabama sturgeon was captured by Service biologists.

Morphological measurements were made and tissue samples were taken for genetic analyses. The fish was fitted with a radio tag and released, but became entangled in submerged gill nets and was found dead two days later.

- June 1995 – it was discovered that the radio tag had dislodged from the Alabama sturgeon that was captured and released on April 18.
- June 1995 – H.R. 1944 was passed prohibiting the Department of the Interior from using any appropriated funds to search for Alabama sturgeon.
- July 1995 – the first meeting of the Mobile River Basin Ecosystem Coalition was held. Meetings have continued approximately every eight weeks to the present.
- August 1995 – the Biodiversity Legal Foundation filed a lawsuit against the Department of the Interior for failure to list the species as endangered in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, Northern Division.
- April 1996 – a third Alabama sturgeon was collected. This fish was taken by a commercial fisherman below Millers Ferry Dam on the Alabama River. This was the first collection of the fish in that reach of the river in 11 years. The fish was released into the river at the collection site.
- July 1996 – a sturgeon conservation plan was jointly developed by the ADCNR, the Alabama-Tombigbee Rivers Coalition, and the Service. The plan was endorsed by the Mobile River Basin Aquatic Ecosystem Recovery Coalition, which represents a broad spectrum of business, agency, and environmental concerns in the state. The Mobile District Corps of Engineers also supported the plan.
- September 1996 – an updated candidate assignment form was signed by the Washington Office making the Alabama sturgeon an official candidate species for listing.
- September 1996 – a sturgeon conservation working group was formed from representatives of various state and federal resource agencies and a representative of the Alabama-Tombigbee Rivers Coalition to implement the plan.
- January 1997 – funding was made available from the Service's Southeast Region to begin implementation of the sturgeon conservation plan. A state hatchery was upgraded to hold and propagate Alabama sturgeon, and broodstock collection began in late March 1997. A male Alabama sturgeon was caught in the spring sample (April), and a female was collected during December 1997. Both fish were transported safely to the Marion State Fish Hatchery.
- January 1998 – the Mobile River Basin Ecosystem Coalition (Ecosystem Coalition) was formally incorporated as a non-profit organization.

- January 1998 – the two captive fish were biopsied. The April 1997 specimen was a mature female with immature eggs, the December 1997 fish was a mature male.
- 1998 fiscal year budget for the Service — Congress appropriated additional funds totaling \$400,000, in the Candidate Conservation subprogram, to fund the sturgeon conservation effort. Fiscal year 1998 Alabama sturgeon conservation efforts included:
 - broodstock collection by the ADCNR, Corps of Engineers Waterways Experiment Station (WES), and the Service's Panama City Field Office;
 - data management and geographic information system work by WES;
 - hatchery support to expand Marion Fish Hatchery for rearing juvenile Alabama sturgeon;
 - Alabama sturgeon habitat identification and characterization by Auburn University, WES, ADCNR, and the Service's Jackson Field Office; and
 - search for juvenile Alabama sturgeon and juvenile habitat by Auburn University.
- May 1998 – a Technical/Agency Draft Mobile River Basin Aquatic Ecosystem Recovery Plan that incorporated the suggestions of the Mobile River Basin Ecosystem Coalition was released for public review and comment.
- July 13, 1998 – the Biodiversity Legal Foundation submitted a petition to the Service to list the Alabama sturgeon. The petition was rejected because the species was already a candidate for listing.
- November 12, 1998 – another Alabama sturgeon was captured and transported to the hatchery. A biopsy revealed it to be an immature male.
- 1999 fiscal year budget for the Service — Congress earmarked \$400,000 (no additional funds provided to the Service) for the sturgeon conservation plan. The state's hatchery and collection efforts are fully funded for this fiscal year.
- March 26, 1999 – a proposal to list the Alabama sturgeon was published in the *Federal Register*. The public comment period was to close on May 26, 1999.
- March 27, 1999 – hatchery personnel attempted to spawn the female and the mature male Alabama sturgeon. The female produced good eggs, but the male failed to produce sperm.
- April 4, 1999 – the captive female died from bacterial infection aggravated by spawning stress.
- May 6, 1999 – the Service received a request for a public hearing from the Alabama-Tombigbee Coalition.

- April 14, 1999 – another Alabama sturgeon was captured by commercial fishermen and delivered to ADCNR fishery biologists. The fish was successfully transported to the state hatchery.
- May 25, 1999 – the Service published a *Federal Register* notice extending the public comment period through July 5, 1999, and announcing a June 24 public hearing in Montgomery, Alabama.
- July 12, 1999 – the Service published a *Federal Register* notice reopening the public comment period until September 10, 1999.
- July 31, 1999 – another Alabama sturgeon was captured and released by commercial fishermen and reported to ADCNR. ADCNR biologists subsequently captured what they believed was the same sturgeon near the site where it had been released. The fish was transported to the state hatchery where it died three days later.
- January, 2000 – ADCNR fisheries personnel biopsy the three fish in captivity to determine reproductive condition. The April, 1999, fish is determined to be a mature female, and the two males are determined to be candidates for spawning. However, the April, 1999, female dies a few days later.
- January 11, 2000 – the Service published a *Federal Register* notice reopening the public comment period through February 10 to enter into the record a Service study, *The Development of a DNA Procedure for the Forensic Identification of Caviar* (also known as the Fain 1999 study).
- February 7, 2000 – the Service published a *Federal Register* notice withdrawing consideration of the Fain 1999 study, replacing it with a report, *Genetic Variation in the River Sturgeon Scaphirhynchus (Acipenseridae) as Inferred from Partial mtDNA Sequences of Cytochrome b*, and extending the comment period through March 8.
- February 16, 2000 – the Service published a *Federal Register* notice reopening the comment period through March 17 to obtain comments on a *Conservation Agreement and Strategy for the Alabama Sturgeon* (also known as the 2000 Strategy).
- May 3, 2000 – the Service published a *Federal Register* notice listing the Alabama sturgeon as an endangered species.